

Anarchism in South East Asia

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“I. contacted me and he wanted to know about anarchism in South East Asia. I am deeply honoured. But this responsibility given by him is actually too big as I am not that fully aware and full of knowledge on this specific topic. Even to find the right words for anarchist movement in South East Asia is beyond of my limit as there’s no such research has been made on this. The book references is almost to none or at least a few as I couldn’t find one except few articles on early anarchist movement especially in peninsular of Malaysia.”

Geographical

South East Asia (SEA) is comprised few comprador states (Marxist term on a state that provided natural resources, workers and component assemblies to more industrialised states). Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Kampuchea, Laos, Myanmar, Brunei, Philippines and East Leste. Every states speak different languages but Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei do speak almost the same language; Malay language.

Historical

Most of the states here was colonized by industrialised states such as British, Netherlands, French, Spanish. Some of the states here even though free from imperialism (on paper), but still served as a comprador and most of the nations used capitalism now even Vietnam.

My intention is not to spend most of the times to explain about SEA but only my view on anarchism in SEA. Given the two big differences on geographical and historical on each states, it is very difficult for me to explain as a whole context but merely on the states which has Malay roots especially in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

Early anarchism in Malaya (Old peninsular of Malaysia)

Fahmi Reza, one of the individualist anarchist in Kuala Lumpur made some research on this matter. His found is very astonishing and base on his article, anarchism in Malaya can be tracked since 1908 and brought by Chinese migrants. (British brought them to work at a tin mines).

By 1918, Truth Society (Chan-She), an anarchist collective has been founded in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh. Their main purpose was to provide reading materials such as books and pamphlets to the Chinese workers.

They produced a few books on anarchism such as Simple Explanation of Anarchism, Conversations Regarding Anarchism for Working Men, The Philosophy and Idea of Anarchism, Anarchism and Socialism and The Principles of Working Men’s Unions.

The first Chinese newspapers in Kuala Lumpur also produced by the anarchist back then; Yik Kuang Poh (To Benefits The Masses) and recognized as the most radical newspapers at that time. Their first publication was on March 1919. Their editor was Goh Tun-ban, an anarchist who was actively spread the ideas of anarchism at Yik Kuang Poh.

The articles he produced on May 1919 on workers movement all around the globe and anti-imperialist as a celebration to May Day, made the British uneasy and anxious. And on July 1919 he was indicted, sent to Pudu Jail and later expelled out of Malaya on November 1919 (some say he was sent back to China).

At the same time, anarchist collectives in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, Seremban and Singapore founded Malaysian Anarchist Federation (MAF) on 1919 and they focused on spreading the anarchism ideas and also a pamphlets on May Day each year. One of the pamphlets was The Power of The Proletariat.

To stop the anarchist movements, The British imposed the Printing Presses Ordinance 1920 which later been used to stop the independence movements and anti-imperialism propaganda such as Printing Presses Act 1948. The Malaysian state authority even went further this draconian and autocratic acts and in 1984, The Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 was imposed to the masses here.

Back to the 1st May of 1921, the first May Day rally was held by anarchists in Ipoh and it was the first May Day rally ever held in Malaya.

After that, anarchism seems has lost among the people and the words of anarchy is very difficult to find in most of the publications even during independence struggle 1948–1957, let alone after independence.

The Rise of Anarchism in Malaysia

In mid of 1990s especially on 1996–1998, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta, Ipoh and Johor Bahru saw the rise of the music of punk. I even admit, I first heard myself the word of anarcho-punk or anarchism by the mouth of those boys who ‘semi-actively’ produced a fanzine on anarcho-punk.

The bands such as Carburetor Dung, The Bollocks and ACAB (skinhead bands) used working class and anarchism as their lyrics and it did created small underground movement among the youths.

But there was no significant movements among the people and later on, anarchism seems circling around the followers up until today.

Problems in Malaysia

A lot of confusion even among anarchists especially in 2000 until 2010 where they distinguished anarchism by the colours! The black and red as the most radical and political ones, the green and black as the less radical and the black and white as the traditional anarchism.

These confusion was so severed and even when I learned about anarchism, took the books of Proudhon, Bakunin and Chomsky alike, my collective, Kaum Babi or The People of Pigs, faced a huge hostility by the so-called anarcho-punks and ANTIFA Malaysia on the early days.

This problem as I suspected is because the lack of publication on anarchism available here and even so, the lack of understanding of the English language.

“The one who can read English is the one who supported the system and the one who can’t read the English, is the one who wanted to abolish the system”.

Not only that, most of the anarchists here are very poor including myself and unemployed. An international books especially on current situations and issues faced by the working class here are too pricey and we couldn’t afford to get as much as we want.

The only way to solve this is by producing from a classic anarchism book which can be found quite easy at libcom.org and theanarchistlibrary.org and also from another free e-books available online.

Even though we couldn't get the latest book (capitalism do evolves and the one faced by anarchist in industrialized states is different than what we face here in SEA), we do trying to get some by downloading whatever is free for us and by the same time, we try to make our own research to understand capitalism and the state which is true to our context.

For example, if the workers here do make a strike, it is easy for the capitalist to close the whole production as we don't have a solid research and development. The factory in Kuala Lumpur easily replace to another factory in Bangkok! So the workers here will left unemployed and may blame the strike for losing a job while it is clear fact that the capitalists do manipulate the situations.

The needs of organize and also founding a workers union face a tantamount efforts as the workers here afraid the word of "anarchism".

The reality in a comprador state Malaysia, the workers here are consisted by a majority of migrant workers from Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia and Myanmar, who do not wish to stay here and ignored the needs of organize. They faced a lot of discriminations not only from the states and its missionaries, but also by most of the people here.

The situations is quite different in Indonesia where the workers are the people who want to stay and settle down there, the locals. But they still faced a lot of tyrannical capitalist as portrayed in a documentary produced by John Pilger and Alan Lowery entitled Globalization and The Poverty of The World.

Another problems we faced is the religion. Whilst most of us are atheist or don't care about a religion, most of the people here does. Since religion played a big part in the Malay society, they seem want to make the world as Islamic state. Anything but Islam is a kuffar so they avoided and go against us even with discussion!

Even, they couldn't distinguished the differences between a Jewish and a Zionist regime and very intolerable towards non-Muslims.

The non-Muslims especially Chinese, live above a poverty line now, so they do not interested to fight the system and believes in bourgeoisie political approach, the so-called parliamentary democracy, democracy from above.

Anarcho-Syndicalism in Malaysia

Anarcho-syndicalism is really-really new here in Malaysia and Indonesia. We just made some meetings among the anarchists in Indonesia and few anarchists in Singapore who are proponent to anarcho-syndicalism.

We do realized the need of organize and also give to the people here about the reality of class struggle and class war.

We are trying to build a union among workers in a few factories. For example, we managed to establish a union, an 'illegal' union, in one factory here in Kuala Lumpur. And may be in a few months, we try to establish another union in one of the factory in Ipoh while trying to establish another union in Kuala Lumpur. What I am trying to say is, we are trying to build a union in

every parts in Malaysia and form a federation of unions.

At the same time, my collective did founded a publication house, Cukong Press, to produce more books, fanzines and also pamphlets. We just released a book, The Black Book, and we do hope that our messages were sent to the right direction. The Black Book was the first book in Malay language on anarchism in our modern time! We wish to translate more books on anarchism from English to Malay language as well.

Our primary objective is to educate the working class and make them realize the power that they possesses.

We are planning to do more discussion with another collectives as well and as try to unite every anarchists.

One of our major task right now is to make people understand the anarchism besides acknowledge the reality especially on capitalism economic current policies specifically on SEA matters.

Hope

The future may looks gloomy as anarchists here in Malaysia faced a huge amount of rejection by the societies which dwell so deep in the doctrines of nationalism, bourgeoisie politics, religions, racism and fascism and also the states combat on anarchists, but we will keep on continue to spread the words and the ideas to the societies.

First, we must educate the masses.

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